



**Clearwater Resource Council
Strategic Plan
2020-2025**



Clearwater Resource Council

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Special Thanks:

Thank you to Bonneville Environmental Foundation and to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation for continued support of model watershed and fuels mitigation work, respectively. And to Bureau of Reclamation for its most recent support which will assist us in our climate change adaptation efforts.

Thank you to the cadre of committed volunteers who have made, and continue to make, many of our programs possible.



Mission

The mission of the Clearwater Resource Council (CRC) is to engage the community and facilitate efforts that will enhance, conserve, sustain, and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Clearwater Watershed for present and future generations.



Vision

We envision a future for our valley that has diverse, productive waters and lands and the species that depend on them. We envision a community that is knowledgeable about its' environment and strongly supports stewardship measures to sustain these resources for their natural, economic and cultural values.

Values

- * Identify common values, facilitate community dialogue and build community capacity to enhance resource protection efforts among citizens, businesses, agencies and other stakeholders;
- * Build common ground by consensus process, to the degree possible;
- * Facilitate timely collection, synthesis and appropriate dissemination of robust information to build community capacity and facilitate informed decision-making; and
- * Develop and support responsible resource stewardship programs.

Our organization

The genesis of the CRC can be traced back to 2004, when Plum Creek Timber Company announced its decision to begin liquidating thousands of acres of its heavily logged lands located in the Clearwater Basin. Recognizing that this threat also represented a unique, one-time opportunity, the CRC was established. For over four years, CRC fought tirelessly to ensure that these lands were transferred to public or non-profit owners, rather than allowing these large tracts of land, which provided critical habitat for endangered and threatened species, to be left for a variety of large scale subdivision projects. CRC tasted its first true success, when the former Plum Creek lands were protected in 2008 via the Clearwater-Blackfoot Project.

CRC has grown as an organization and focuses on a range of issues to protect the unique natural resources which characterize the Valley ranging from water quality to fuels mitigation projects. CRC's effectiveness with relatively limited dollars, is in large part due to its large and dedicated network of volunteers which assist with many of CRC's monitoring efforts, along with educational programming and fundraising events.

The organization is now at the point of maturation, and under the leadership of the CRC board and new Executive Director, is poised to embark upon an expanded mission in order to better address the changes associated with climate change. Ecosystem resiliency, both aquatic and terrestrial, is driving the mission of the organization, with efforts now being made in areas which are new to us, such as our pending energy efficiency project. As CRC moves into the future, we will retain much of our core programming, but are redefining priorities based on a rapidly changing landscape. Similar in the situation faced by the CRC board in 2004, the threat of climate change also presents us with opportunities to enhance resource protection efforts and encourage better land stewardship and land use planning. CRC is looking forward to work in partnership with the community and local agencies to meet these challenges to the best of our ability.



Clearwater Valley

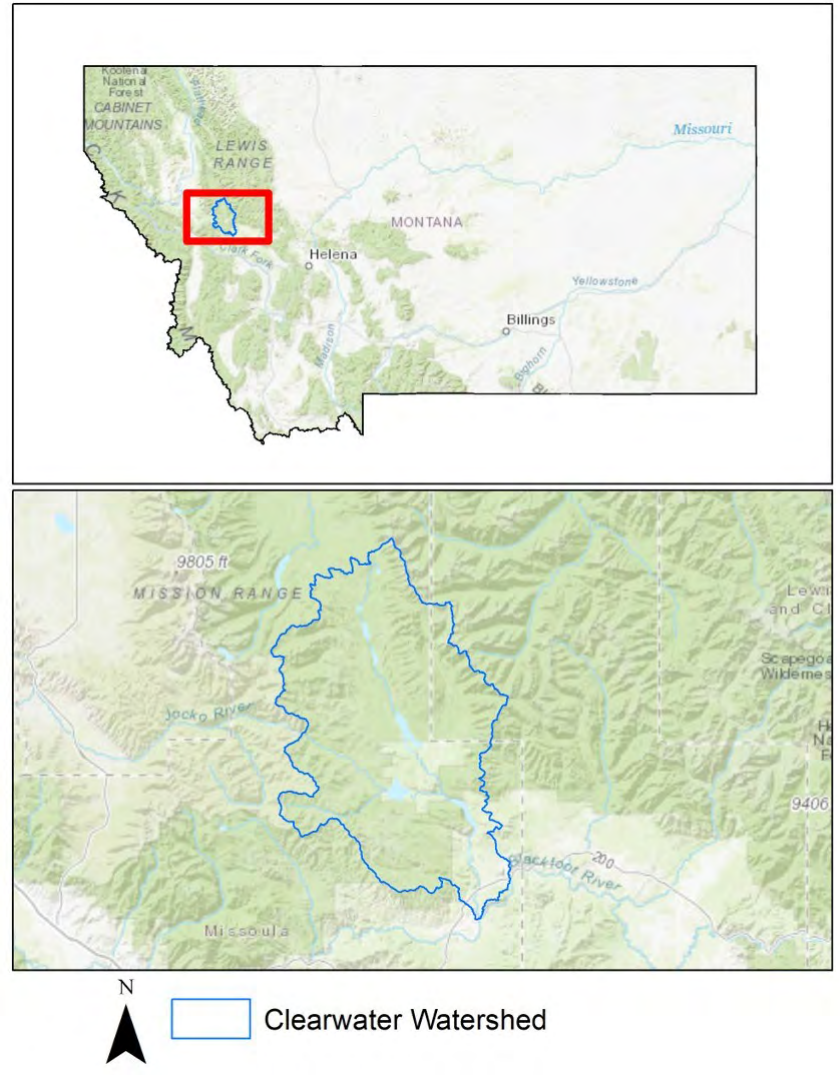
The Clearwater watershed, located in Missoula County, Montana, has unique natural resource values as it forms the southernmost portion of the North Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), which extends from the Highwood River in Alberta to the Blackfoot River in Montana. The NCDE is also known as the “Crown of the Continent,” and encompasses over 10 million acres of some of the most unspoiled lands in the continental U.S. Astoundingly, all of the plants and animals which resided here during the expedition of Lewis and Clark in the early 1800s continue to inhabit this region, making it all the more important to conserve these lands for the continued survival of these species. Additionally, the watershed has unique cultural values to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Blackfoot Nation who referred to this area as the “backbone of the world.” The region embodies the convergence of natural beauty and heritage.

Locally, the Clearwater Valley is known as the “Chain of Lakes.” Glacial forces shaped this region’s unique topography over two million

years ago, and formed the succession of lakes in the Clearwater, which from north to south include: Summit Lake, Clearwater Lake, Rainy Lake, Lake Alva, Lake Inez, Seeley Lake, Placid Lake, Big Sky Lake and Salmon Lake. The economic importance of these lakes is undeniable as the hub of activity here is based on the area’s world class natural resources which provide prime recreational opportunities, such as fishing, swimming, and boating, for residents and tourists alike.

The Clearwater is still relatively pristine in nature, yet it hosts several species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The complex connectivity of the waterways in this region provides the ideal ecosystem for the threatened bull trout, while the large swaths of uninterrupted forested areas provide habitat for grizzly bears and Canada lynx. Moreover, together with the Swan Lake region and the Lincoln Ranger District, the Clearwater has distinctive landscape connectivity value, linking the Bob Marshall, the Lincoln Scapegoat, and the Mission Mountain Wilderness areas. This landscape connectivity is vital to the survival of many organisms, as habitat fragmentation is one of the most commonly cited threats to both aquatic and terrestrial species survival.

Cooperative and productive management is integral to protecting the integrity of the habitats and ecosystems in the Clearwater Valley. The flora and fauna, dramatic glacially carved landscapes, and long standing rich cultural heritage in this region makes conserving these lands for generations to come of paramount importance.



Key Accomplishments

The Clearwater Valley's large chain of freshwater lakes and its function as a wildlife corridor on the broader landscape in connecting several critically important wilderness areas renders it unique in Montana, in the Crown of the Continent landscape and in the northwest region. CRC's role is to maintain ecosystem functions, ecological resiliency and biodiversity in this unique landscape, while balancing the needs of the local community to preserve an authentic and rural lifestyle.

CRC's accomplishments to protect the Clearwater Valley include, but are not limited to:

- * Created and led the Seeley-Swan Fuels Mitigation Task Force, and within the Clearwater Valley treated approximately 2500 acres of private lands over a 16 year period to reduce the risk of lives and property from catastrophic wildfire.
- * Developed monitoring programs, in partnership with residents, to assess water quality in lakes and streams and strive for better land use practices on-the-ground.
- * Spearheaded an aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention program to stop new AIS, and in particular zebra/quagga mussels from colonizing Valley lakes.
- * Conducted a landscape assessment for the Clearwater Valley planning area, which addressed the objectives of enhancing, conserving and protecting the natural ecosystems and rural lifestyle of the region.



- * Initiated the revisions of the Seeley Lake Regional Plan which, in part, ensured that 87,000 acres of Plum Creek disposition lands were transferred to agencies or organizations with a conservation focus, rather than for private development;
- * Partnered with U.S. EPA and the Seeley Lake Community Foundation on efforts to reduce the adverse impacts of wood stoves on air quality and reduce emission loads;
- * Initiated the Clearwater Forest Management Initiative, which engaged landowners, agencies, and organizations in coordinated efforts related to forest management through an open process that encouraged input and cooperation to complete mapping, monitoring, stewardship and restoration activities.
- * Played a leadership role in the Southwest Crown of the Continent (SWCC) Collaborative Forest Restoration Project (CFLRP), over a 10-year period (2009-2019), deploying over \$40 million on National Forest lands to reduce the risk of fire to rural communities, and restore forests and aquatic ecosystems.
- * Partnered with the Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF) from 2011-2021 to implement the BEF/CRC model watershed protection program to enhance aquatic resource protection efforts.
- * Enhanced educational efforts by hosting a minimum of four public workshops/presentations annually and working directly with local schools to deploy water quality and AIS curricula.



As climate change impacts accelerate, the pre-existing threats on the landscape will also likely become more problematic. The focus of CRC programs over the next five years will address and related to one of the key priority areas:

- Continue to work on programs that protect and improve both water quality and quantity;
- Expand forest health initiatives by addressing issues related to historic fire suppression and lack of pro-active treatment and management;
- Facilitate terrestrial and aquatic habitat restoration and resiliency to better prepare for adverse climate conditions; and
- Prevent the introduction of new AIS, with a focus on invasive mussel species.

More specifically, CRC will focus on the following actions and strategies to effect positive change at the landscape level.

EXPAND existing aquatics programs	Programs	Benchmarks	Positive change
	Adopt-a-lake	Increase parameters measured (nutrients and DO) to obtain robust baseline for all lakes	Management recommendations based on sound science to improve water quality and impact land use decisions.
	Adopt-a-stream	Continue post-fire monitoring to assess trends, as appropriate	
	Students-in-Action	Continue Morrell Creek monitoring effort in Partnership with the high school, and add macroinvertebrate monitoring to ongoing efforts	Data will provide us with the ability to track trends over time.
	Macroinvertebrates	Commence macroinvertebrate monitoring as part of the adopt-a-stream program	Macroinvertebrates serve as the “canary in the coal mine” and can warn of adverse declines in advance of broader water quality trends. This will allow for more shift adaptation measures to be deployed if needed.
	AIS	Amend monitoring program to enhance statistical validity; revisit boat monitors program; and undertake “gating” assessment.	The prevention of new AIS introductions will protect the sustainability and resiliency of aquatic systems.
	Clearwater Lakes Alliance (CLA)	In partnership with lake residents, commence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake assist program; and • Lake management plans for each lake 	Increase in pro-active stewardship of lakeshore property owners.

The CRC aquatics programs will be increasingly necessary as water quality appears to be declining in the Clearwater Valley as witnessed by increased toxic algae blooms in recent years. Obtaining the data needed to better understand trends will translate into policies on-the-ground. In addition, the CLA program will serve to incentivize partners to become more pro-active stewards of the lakes upon which they live. Though not mentioned explicitly above, sporadic dewatering issues are also occurring in the Chain of Lakes, and will be further addressed in the Clearwater Watershed Plan discussed below.

EMBARK on Climate Change Adaptation & Implementation Program	Programs	Benchmarks	Positive change
	Climate Change Adaptation Plan	Plan to be developed in tandem with the BOR supported Watershed Restoration Plan (see below)	Obtain funding and implement projects that will maintain and enhance ecosystem resiliency protect T&E species, biodiversity, and sustainability
	Energy	Implement solar project(s) and assist low income families with reduced energy bills	Reduce emissions and serve as demonstrations projects to encourage private action
	Forest Management	Develop plans in partnership with federal, state and non-profit organizations	Retain existing stands of very large trees and manage for their future resiliency

It is likely that once the Climate Change Adaptation Plan is completed, additional work elements will be incorporated into the CRC annual workplan to better address ecosystem needs.

ENHANCE Fuels Mitigation Program	Programs	Benchmarks	Positive change
	Fuels Task Force	Continue partnership and update fuels plan as needed	Cooperative efforts will allow for swifter changes across jurisdictional lines as drier conditions accelerate
	Fuels Treatment	Measured by the number of acres thinned or treated via forest management or prescribed fire	Treatment in the WUI will save lives and property, while at the same time protecting critical habitat and desired forest conditions
	Home surveys	Measured by the number of surveys conducted as a percentage of total need	An increased number of landowners will participate in "fire safe" practices
Education	See below	See below	



Photos & trail camera image by Jeff Harrits

ENERGIZE Landscape Restoration Efforts	Programs	Benchmarks	Positive change
	Watershed Plan	Completion of plan with prioritized terrestrial and aquatic restoration projects	Plan will enable CRC to fund highest priority projects systematically.
	Terrestrial Restoration	# of acres restored	Improved forest health, ecosystem diversity, habitat, connectivity and resiliency
	Aquatic Restoration	# of stream/lakeshore line/wetlands restored	Improved water quality, habitat condition, fish passage or barriers, etc.
	CLA	# and type of actions taken by private property owners to protect lakes	Increased stewardship resulting in improved riparian conditions and water quality.

The conclusion of CFLRP in 2019, resulted in a decline in funding for forest restoration activities. CRC hopes to reinvigorate restoration activities using both new and existing partnerships and sources of funding.

ENGAGE & EMPOWER Community	Programs	Benchmarks		Positive change
	Montana Tales/ Workshops/ Events	Min. of 4 per year	Newsletters/ Social Media/ website/ press releases/ community calendar.	Increase in knowledge and support for conservation and increase in stewardship.
	Youth	Deployment of high school and middle school curricula, summer camps and Student-in-Action (see above)	*****	Increase in knowledge and support for conservation, and development of future stewards of the environment.
	AIS	Efforts undertaken via a variety of venues, including partners and boat launch program	For selected events, pre-and post- surveys will be provided to determine education value.	Increase peer-to-peer learning.
	Fuels Mitigation	As part of home surveys, workshops and events		Increase compliance with prevention efforts.
	Proposed Sewer	As needed.		Increased participation if fuels mitigation program.
	CLA	See above		TBD
			See above	

Seeley Lake has shown increased nutrient loading, which in part is due to failing septic systems in the Town of Seeley Lake. A sewer has been proposed to partially address this issue. CRC may participate as needed in providing the needed data to facilitate decisions around both the sewer and the land use planning that will be necessary if the proposed sewer plan moves forward.



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- * Heidi Sedivy, Special Projects Coordinator
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- * Ryan Bell, Community Forester
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